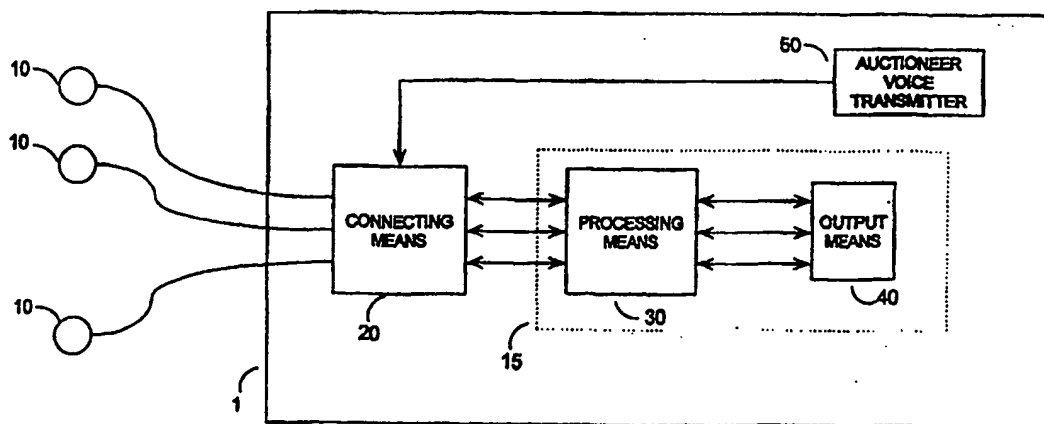




INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification 7 : H04M 3/50, 3/56, G06F 17/60		A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 00/19691
			(43) International Publication Date: 6 April 2000 (06.04.00)
(21) International Application Number: PCT/CA99/00871		(81) Designated States: AE, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).	
(22) International Filing Date: 24 September 1999 (24.09.99)			
(30) Priority Data: 60/101,857 25 September 1998 (25.09.98) US 2,264,407 4 March 1999 (04.03.99) CA			
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(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONDUCTING AN AUCTION OVER A COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK



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(57) Abstract

Methods of holding auctions over the Internet and telephone systems are known in the art but generally share the following problems: it is difficult for the auctioneer to identify bidders; telephone conferences are very noisy when they have a large number of participants; there is no method of ejecting a bidder who chooses to interfere with the auction; and it is difficult to enforce payment because it is difficult to verify the identity and creditworthiness of bidders. The invention provides for an auction system where bidders are identified using authentication or similar techniques, and their bids are filtered to reduce noise and eliminate unwanted bids or comments before being broadcast to the balance of the bidders. Other optional features are also described such as the recording and timestamping of bids.

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System and Method for Conducting an Auction over a Communications Network

FIELD OF INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to communication networks and more particularly to a system for conducting an auction over a communications network.

BACKGROUND

Traditional auctions take the form of a physical gathering of bidders at an auction place. A major limitation associated with physical auctions is that bidders are forced either to travel or to appoint a representative for the auction.

Advance bidding may be done by mail or by facsimile so that bidders do not have to be physically present at the auction. However, advance bidding suffers a significant disadvantage as compared to real-time bidding since it lacks immediacy and the bidders have no opportunity to increase a bid in quick response to competitive bids.

Several methods of conducting auctions over the Internet in real-time fashion are known. This requires, however, that all participants in the auction use an Internet-connected computer. Furthermore, auctioneers may find that it is more difficult to obtain a good price with an auction conducted over the Internet because it lacks the excitement that can be conveyed by voice.

Telephone conference systems are used today to share, in real-time, voice messages among persons in various locations. It is difficult, however, to hold an auction using a traditional telephone conferencing system, at least for the following reasons: the auctioneer may have difficulty identifying bidders by their voices; telephone conferences are very noisy when they have a large number of participants; there is no method of ejecting a bidder who chooses to interfere with the auction by making noise or pretending to be the auctioneer; and it is difficult to enforce payment because it is difficult to verify the identity and creditworthiness of bidders.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

It is therefore an object of this invention to provide an improved auction system that overcomes totally or in part the limitations of the above-mentioned auction systems.

5 One aspect of the invention is defined as a bidder message processor comprising processing means for processing a bidder message entered through a bidder voice terminal into a bidder data signal, wherein said bidder data signal includes a bidder identifier, and output means for outputting the bidder data signals at an auctioneer terminal.

10 Another aspect of the invention is defined as a bidder message processor system comprising a bidder message processor and connecting means. The bidder message processor comprises processing means for processing a bidder message entered through a bidder voice terminal into a bidder data signal, wherein said bidder data signal includes a bidder identifier, and output means for outputting the bidder data signals at an auctioneer terminal. The connecting means connect the bidder message processor to the bidder voice terminal over a communications network.

15 Another aspect of the invention is defined as an auctioneer message processor system comprising an auctioneer voice transmitter for broadcasting auctioneer voice messages from an auctioneer terminal simultaneously to a plurality of bidder voice terminals, and connecting means for connecting said bidder voice terminals to said auctioneer voice transmitter over a communications network.

20 A further aspect of the invention is defined as an auction system for use in an auction conducted over a communications network, the auction system comprising a bidder message processor, an auctioneer voice transmitter and connecting means.

25 The bidder message processor comprises means for processing a bidder message entered through any one of a plurality of bidder voice terminals into a bidder data signals, wherein said bidder data signal comprises a bidder identifier, and means for outputting the bidder data signals at an auctioneer terminal. The auctioneer voice transmitter broadcasts auctioneer voice messages from the auctioneer terminal simultaneously to selected bidder voice terminals. The connecting means connect
30

said bidder voice terminals to the bidder message processor and to the auctioneer voice transmitter over the communications network.

5 A further aspect of the invention is defined as an auction system comprising auctioneer output means, a plurality of bid interpreters which in operation are connected to a plurality of corresponding bidders voice terminals, an auctioneer voice manager coupled to the bid interpreters, for receiving voice messages from an auctioneer voice transmitter over the communications network and for broadcasting the auctioneer voice messages simultaneously to all bidder voice terminals connected to the bidder interpreters. Each bid interpreter includes means for decoding bidder
10 messages, means for attaching corresponding bidder identifiers to each decoded bidder message and forming data signals and means for transmitting the data signals to the auctioneer output means, over a communications network.

A further aspect of the invention is defined as a method of processing bidder messages for use in an auction conducted over a communications network, the method
15 comprising the steps of processing a bidder messages received entered through a voice terminal into a data (digital) signals, the processing step comprising attaching a bidder identifier to said data signal, and outputting said data signal at an auctioneer terminal;

A further aspect of the invention is defined as a method of conducting an auction over a communications network, the method comprising the steps of
20 transmitting bidders messages over the communications network and transmitting auctioneer messages over the communications network. The step of transmitting bidders messages comprises receiving the bidder messages from a plurality of bidder voice terminals, processing bidders messages into data signals, forming output signals by attaching bidder identifiers to selected data signals, and sending and outputting the
25 output signals at an auctioneer terminal. The step of transmitting auctioneer messages comprises receiving the auctioneer messages from the auctioneer terminal and broadcasting the auctioneer messages to selected bidder voice terminals.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

The present invention will be further understood from the following detailed description, with reference to the drawings in which:

Figure 1 presents a block diagram of an auction system in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 2 presents a block diagram of a bidder message processor system in accordance with the embodiment in **Figure 1**; and

Figure 3 presents a block diagram of an auction system in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Figure 1 presents a block diagram of an auction system 1 in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. Auction system 1 is used to facilitate the participation, in real-time, of persons located at various physical locations in an auction, by means of voice terminals 10. The communication takes place over a communications network 5, comprising the bidder voice terminals 10 and the auction system 1.

The auction system 1 comprises an auctioneer voice transmitter 50, a bidder messages processor 15 and connecting means 20 connecting the bidder voice terminals 10 to the auctioneer voice transmitter 50 and to the bidder messages processor 15. The bidder messages processor 15 comprises processing means 30 and output means 40.

The bidder voice terminals 10 may be any one of cordline, cordless, wireless telephone sets or the like. Other voice terminals may also be used, as they emerge.

The connections between various components of the auction system 1, as well as between the bidder voice terminals 10 and the auction system, can be physical connections, wireless connections or a combination of both. Likewise, it will be appreciated by a person skilled in the art that the elements of the auction system 1, such as the connecting means 20 and the processing means 30, can each comprise sub-elements distributed at various physical locations. Furthermore, they may be mainly software structures attached to existing hardware platforms available in existing

communications networks, specially designed hardware platforms, or a combination of both, such as interface access cards. Moreover, the auctioneer's tasks may be performed by a person or by a data processor that may act on location or remotely, in analyzing the information on the output means 40 and commanding the auctioneer voice transmitter 50 to send voice messages to bidder terminals 10. Therefore, the communication links and the blocks shown in the block diagram of Figure 1 should not be considered restrictive in a physical sense.

In operation, a bidder participating in an auction conducted using the auction system 1 of Figure 1, enters bidder messages through a bidder voice terminal 10. The bidder messages are transmitted to the processing means 30 through connecting means 20. The bidder messages are processed into bidder data signals to be outputted at the output means 40 in order of arrival. The processed bidder data signals comprise information on the bidder message content as well as a bidder identifier. Therefore, through the output means 40, the auctioneer acknowledges the content of bidder messages and the identity of bidders that originate the messages, in orderly fashion. This allows the auctioneer to identify the bidders, reducing ambiguity when more bids are received within a small time interval from various locations.

In order to communicate with the bidders, the auctioneer generates voice messages through the auctioneer voice transmitter 50. From the auctioneer voice transmitter 50, the auctioneer voice messages are broadcasted simultaneously to the bidder voice terminals 10 through the connecting means 20.

The connecting means 20 comprises input/output (I/O) ports which allow messages from the bidder voice terminals 10 to pass through to the rest of the auction system 1 and allow messages from the auction system 1 to be transmitted to the bidder voice terminals 10. The connecting means can be any combination of hardware and software connecting means available in existing communication networks, such as wire circuits, fiber optics circuits, wireless circuits, virtual connections, with or without associated controls, such as manually operated switchboards or other interfaces, or through embedded logical systems, comprising multiplexers, flip-flops, latches and the like. Since the connecting means 20 regulates the flow of messages from and to the bidder voice terminals 10, the connecting means

20 maintains a record of bidders participating in the auction, through the auction system 1. The record of participating bidders can be maintained in a list set-up for this purpose, or by simply maintaining the communication channels with participating bidders open, and ensuring that communication channels with non-participating bidders are blocked. Preferably, the record of bidders participating to the auction is updated based on access conditions. Such an embodiment will be described in more detail hereinafter.

Figure 2 presents a detailed view of the bidder message processor 15 and the connecting means 20, according to an embodiment of the invention.

The bidder message processor 15 comprises processing means 30 and output means 40.

In the embodiment in Figure 2, the processing means 30 comprises recognizing means 35, a bidder identifier appending block 34, an access control block 37 and a voice coder 36.

A bidder message entering the processing means 30 is routed to the recognizing means 35, where its content is recognized. The recognizing means 35 select the auction relevant messages from other bidder messages that a bidder may input through a bidder voice terminal 10. The auction relevant messages can be, for example, bids or access messages.

The valid bids can be numerical voice messages such as "One hundred and fifty (150)", or "Two thousand(2000)". For simplicity, it is assumed that the price and the bids are represented by numerical values. However, it will be understood that an auction may be conducted by coding the implied trading means otherwise than in a numerical fashion, for example by a color code.

The access messages generally contain information which bidders are required to provide in order to participate in various stages of the auction. The access messages may be passwords, credit information, confirmations of compliance with terms and conditions of the auction, and the like.

Through the bidder voice terminals 10, bidder messages can be entered in various ways. The bidder messages may be voice messages or digital signals. For example, if a bidder voice terminal 10 is a telephone set having the touch-tone™

option, bidder messages can be entered as Dual-Tone-Multi-Frequency (DTMF) signals.

The embodiment depicted in **Figure 2** comprises a DTMF decoder **31** and a voice decoder **32**, for decoding the bidder messages into data signals that are further filtered by a message selector **33**. The DTMF decoder **31** and the voice decoder **32**, may be any such decoders known in the art. Based on the decoded bidder messages coming from the DTMF decoder **31** or from the voice decoder **32**, the message selector **33** selects the auction relevant bidder messages. The message selector **33** may comprise, for example, a database comprising codes representing either auction relevant messages or parts of auction messages, such that bidder messages can be selected as being relevant to the auction being conducted or as being unintelligible with respect to the auction conducted. However, any other means known in the art for identifying a given signal as matching one of a plurality of predetermined codes, can be employed for the implementation of the message selector **33**. Voice recognition algorithms common in the art often comprise voice decoding means and selection means such as blocks **32** and **33** in **Figure 2**.

Message selector **33** may perform one of several tasks. Some of the auction relevant messages, such as bids, are sent to the bidder identifier appending block **34** which appends a bidder identifier, and sends the message, in this new form, to the output means **40**. Other auction relevant messages, such as access messages, may be analyzed within an access control block **37**. Bidder messages selected as being unintelligible with respect to the conducted auction may be discarded or may be sent to the access control block **37**, as well.

The access control block **37** may perform one or more of several functions. The access control block **37** may verify an access message such as a password or a credit card number, for example by accessing special databases such as a credit database **90**. Also, in order to determine the access rights of a bidder to the auction, the access control block **37** may generate access information requests as data signals **22** that are coded into voice messages by a voice coder block **36** and sent, through the connecting means **20**, to targeted bidder voice terminal **10**. Furthermore, upon determining whether a certain bidder may or may not participate in the auction, the

access control block 37 may send control signals 24 to the connecting means 20, instructing the connecting means 20 to allow or to restrict the communication of said bidder with the auction system 1. In this way, the access control block 37 updates the record of bidders participating in the auction, which is maintained by the connecting means 20 as previously described.

Whenever the message selector 33 detects a bidder message that is not relevant to the auction, which may be just noise or a comment not pertaining to the auction, the message selector can either discard such a message or it can allow the auction system 1 to respond to such a message, by sending an indicative signal to the access control block 37. Upon reception of such a signal, indicating the reception of a bidder message that is not relevant to the auction, the access control block 37 may generate an alert signal. Alert signals may be further processed in various ways. They may be stored within a memory component of the access control block 37 for further use. Also, an alert signal may be sent through the voice coder block 36 and through the connecting means 20, to the bidder voice terminal 10 at which said message selected as being not relevant to the auction originated. Such an alert signal may, for example, inform the bidder that the message was not understood and it must be re-entered, or, that the bidder voice terminal 10 has to be disconnected from the auction system 1, because of the unacceptable transmission of repeated unintelligible messages.

The output means 40 are preferably, but not restricted to, visual display means such as a monitor screen, that permit an auctioneer to acknowledge the bidder messages and the identity of the bidders originating them.

A time compensation block 70 allows the auction system 1 to estimate propagation delays of signals in traveling within the communications network 5. The estimates may be used to compensate for the bias in favor of physically closer bidders, for whom the bidding signals have to travel a smaller distance. In deciding which bid was placed first in real-time, to compensate for these delays, the computer may subtract the round trip delay through network 5 from the time at which the bid was received at the output means. The estimates may also be used to alert the auctioneer that a bidder had entered a bid before being able to hear the closing gavel, and that his bid should therefore be allowed.

The time compensation block 70 can obtain the propagation delay estimates by any suitable technique known in the art. For example, they can be obtained from the controlling software of the network 5. Alternatively, round-trip estimates may be obtained by estimating the delay before receiving an echo from the bidder voice terminal 10 using a system identification algorithm based on the echo cancellation technique known in the art. Another option is to attach a time stamp to every message originated within the auction system 1 or at a bidder voice terminal 10.

In the embodiment in **Figure 2**, a voice conferencing block 80 is used to enable a voice conferencing system among the auctioneer and the participating bidders. The voice conferencing block 80 may use any of the common voice-conferencing techniques known in the art, preferably combined with techniques used to reduce the effect of combining background noise from many sources, such as the companding or squelch techniques.

In the embodiment depicted in **Figure 2**, the time compensation block 70 and the voice conferencing block 80 are shown as being connected to the connecting means 20, since preferably, either one of the routines achieved by these blocks involves only bidders participating in the auction. As previously described, a record of such bidders is maintained through the connecting means 20.

A controller 100 controls the overall operation of the components of the auction system 1. For example, the controller 100 determines the output format on the output means 40 as well as various access control routines within the access control block 37. Preferably, the auctioneer may access the auction system 1 and determine the operation of its components through an auctioneer interface (not shown), linked to the controller 100.

The embodiment of the invention presented in **Figures 1 and 2** addresses the problems noted in the Background section, as follows. The auction system in **Figures 1 and 2** allows real-time communication among bidders and auctioneer, without requiring bidders to be physically present at an auction place, or to appoint a representative at an auction place. Through this system, bidders may communicate bidirectionally with the auctioneer by means of voice terminals. By allowing the auction to be conveyed by voice at least on the bidders side, the system described

above is closer to recreating the atmosphere of physical auctions and thus can be found more entertaining or easier to use by potential bidders, leading to a potentially more competitive bidding process. Furthermore, voice terminals can be incorporated within personal computers or they can function as independent pieces of equipment. In the later case, they can be more accessible in terms of cost of use. Furthermore, current voice terminals are usually wider spread and better connected to existing communication networks, than Internet connected computers used in prior-art systems. Even further, wireless voice terminals are smaller and lighter, thus easier to carry than personal computers.

In addition, the auction system 1 presented in **Figures 1 and 2** overcomes the problems that would be encountered in conducting an auction using a traditional telephone conference system, mentioned in the background. Incoming messages from bidders are processed in a form that allows the auctioneer to identify corresponding bidders, through the output means 40. Messages from bidders are outputted in order of arrival. Through the time compensation block 70, the auction system 1 may account for delays over the communications network 5. Through the access control block 37, bidders without credit or bidders that choose to interfere with the auction by making noise can be ejected from the auction.

Figure 3 shows a block diagram of an auction system 1 in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention. The auction system 1 comprises a plurality of bid interpreters 14, an auctioneer's computer 45, an auctioneer's telephone set 50 and an auctioneer voice manager 18.

In operation, bidders participate, in real-time, in an auction using bidder telephone sets 10 connected to the auction system 1. Each bidder telephone set 10 may establish a connection 16 through a telephony network 2, such as the Public Switch Telephony Network (PSTN), to a corresponding bid interpreter 14. The bid interpreters 14 process voice or DTMF bidder messages received through connections 16 from bidder telephone sets 10 into data packets. The data packets thus formed are passed through connections 24 and data network 3, such as the Internet, to be summarized and displayed on the auctioneer's computer 45, in a summary form. The auctioneer analyzes the information on the auctioneer computer 45 and uses the

auctioneer telephone set 50 to enter a voice message to be broadcasted to the bidder telephone sets 10 of the participating bidders. The auctioneer's telephone set 50 establishes a connection 17 through the telephony network 2 to an auctioneer voice manager 18. The auctioneer voice manager 18 passes the auctioneer's voice through connections 26 to bid interpreters 14. In turn, the bid interpreters 14 pass the auctioneer messages through the connections 16 to bidder telephone sets 10. In this embodiment, the selection of the bidder telephone sets 10 corresponding to participating bidders, and which, therefore, should receive auctioneer messages, is done at the level of the bid interpreters 14, as it will be explained in more detail later.

The bid interpreters 14 are microcomputers performing various operations. One such operation is processing bidder messages into data packets to be sent to the auctioneer computer 45 for display or for further processing. Each data packet formed at a bid interpreter 14 and sent to the auctioneer computer 45, carries information identifying the bidder that entered the message or the corresponding bidder telephone set 10. For processing bidder voice messages into data packets, the bid interpreters 14 use suitable voice recognition algorithms known in the art. According to this embodiment, the bid interpreters 14 may also interpret DTMF signals received from bidder telephone sets 10 that have the touch-tone™ option.

Optionally, the bid interpreters 14 in Figure 3 also perform various authorization procedures. Authorization procedures comprise requesting access information and analyzing access messages from bidders in order to verify the identities of bidders, their creditworthiness, their compliance with predetermined terms and conditions of the auction and the like. In order to perform the authorization procedures, the bid interpreters 14 use voice recognition and other decoding algorithms to recognize passwords or other access messages such as a credit card number. In this embodiment, the bid interpreters 14 may access credit databases in order to verify the credit information provided by bidders. Data packets informing the auctioneer computer 45 of the results of the authorization procedures carried at the bid interpreters 14 are sent through connections 24 to the auctioneer computer 45. Upon failure to meet authorization conditions, the auctioneer's computer 45 may deny participation in the auction to unauthorized bidders, by sending back data packets

through connections 24 to the corresponding bid interpreters 14, commanding them to shut down. Alternatively, the auctioneer computer 45 may disconnect the input ports for connections 26 to the bid interpreters 14 corresponding to unauthorized bidders. Also, the auctioneer computer 45 may ignore the data packets coming through connections 24 from the bid interpreters 14 corresponding to unauthorized bidders.

The auctioneer computer 45 analyzes the data packets received from the bid interpreters 14. Selected data packets, such as those that contain bidding information, are outputted in a format that allows the auctioneer to acknowledge the content of the data packets and to identify the associated bidders. The data packets can be outputted by any means known in the art, such as visual, using a monitor terminal connected to the auctioneer computer 45 or audio, using speakers attached to the auctioneer computer 45. The auctioneer may select the output means and a format of outputting data packets best suited to his or her needs, by means of a user interface (not shown) on the auctioneer computer 45.

The data packets are presented according to a predetermined scheme. According to this embodiment, the auctioneer's computer 45 uses estimates of the different time delays for different bidders through networks 2 and 3 to compensate for the bias in favor of "closer" users, and uses these estimates in the predetermined scheme, in order to output data packets according to the time when the associated bidder messages were actually entered. In this embodiment, the auctioneer computer 45 accomplishes the time compensation routine by subtracting the round-trip delay through networks 2 and 3 of each data packet it receives, from the time at which same data packet is received, before deciding which data packet came first. The same method may be used to alert the auctioneer that a bidder had entered a bid before being able to hear the closing gavel, and the bid should therefore be allowed. The round-trip time estimates needed for this embodiment are obtained from the controlling software for the networks 2 and 3. Alternatively, the round-trip estimates could be obtained from the delay in receiving an echo from a bidder telephone set 10 using a system identification algorithm based on the echo cancellation technique known in the art.

In accordance with the embodiment in **Figure 3**, the auctioneer computer **45** may command the bid interpreters **14** to act as part of a voice conferencing system by sending data packets through connections **24** to the bid interpreters **14**. With the voice conferencing system thus enabled, bidders participating in the auction can hear the voices of active bidders in addition to the voice of the auctioneer. Active bidders are herein defined as bidders participating in the auction and entering bidder messages representing valid bids through their telephone sets **10**. Inactive bidders are bidders participating in the auction that remain silent on the line, bidders involved in a different auction process than a bidding process, such a process of obtaining authorization, or bidders who make comments that do not pertain to the auction. The distinction among active and inactive bidders is made at the level of bid interpreters **14**, which use voice recognition or other suitable decoding algorithms, to recognize the content of the messages received from bidders.

In accordance with another embodiment of the invention, an auction may be conducted with bidders participating in the auction over a communications network using voice terminals connected to an auction system such as described in any of **Figures 1 to 3**, for example, with other bidders being physically present to the auction, and yet with other bidders participating in the auction over the Internet.

The invention could also be implemented to a lesser extent on existing Internet and PSTN networks. For example, Internet servers could be given much of the functionality of the invention similar to applications such as NetMeeting. Alternatively, the invention could be implemented as an application program on the personal computers of end users interconnected over the Internet, although this allows the possibility of timestamps being inaccurate or falsified, and also makes it difficult to ensure that all participants are using current software. On the PSTN a specialized server could be attached to a class 5 switch. These implementations would not have all the benefits of the invention, but could apply certain aspects of its teachings.

The method steps of the invention may be embodied in sets of executable machine code stored in a variety of formats such as object code or source code. Such code is described generically herein as programming code, or a computer program for simplification. Clearly, the executable machine code may be integrated with the code

of other programs, implemented as subroutines, by external program calls or by other techniques as known in the art.

5 The embodiments of the invention may be executed by a computer processor or similar device programmed in the manner of method steps, or may be executed by an electronic system which is provided with means for executing these steps.

Similarly, an electronic memory means such computer diskettes, CD-Roms, Random Access Memory (RAM), Read Only Memory (ROM) or similar computer software storage media known in the art, may be programmed to execute such method steps.

10 As well, electronic signals representing these method steps may also be transmitted via a communication network.

Numerous modifications, variations, and adaptations may be made to the particular embodiments of the invention described above, without departing from the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A bidder message processor comprising:
processing means for processing a bidder message entered through a bidder voice terminal into a bidder data signal, wherein said bidder data signal includes a bidder identifier; and
output means for outputting the bidder data signals at an auctioneer terminal.
2. The bidder message processor in claim 1, wherein the processing means further comprises means for recognizing an auction relevant bidder message.
3. The bidder message processor in claim 2, wherein the means for recognizing comprises means for decoding a Dual Tone Multi Frequency (DTMF) bidder message.
4. The bidder message processor in claim 2, wherein the means for recognizing comprises voice recognition means for decoding a voice bidder message.
5. The bidder message processor in any one of claims 3 or 4, wherein the means for recognizing further comprises means for identifying each detected auction relevant messages as being either one of a bid and an access messages.
6. The bidder message processor in claim 1, further comprising access control means for determining a right of access of a bidder to an auction.
7. The bidder message processor in claim 6, further comprising:
means for generating an access information request and transmitting the same to said bidder voice terminal.
8. The bidder message processor in claim 5, wherein the access message can be any one of a password, a credit information code, a response of compliance with predetermined access terms and conditions for the auction.

9. The bidder message processor in claim 5, wherein said access control means further comprises means for verifying the access messages.
10. The bidder message processor system in claim 9, wherein said means for verifying comprises means to connect to a database of access information..
11. A bidder message processor system comprising
a bidder message processor as in claim 1; and
connecting means for connecting said bidder message processor to said bidder voice terminal over a communications network.
12. The bidder message processor system in claim 11, wherein the bidder message processor further comprises access control means for determining a right of access of a bidder to an auction, and wherein the access control means generates access control signals for allowing said connecting means to connect the bidder voice terminal to the auctioneer terminal and for creating a record of participating bidders.
13. The bidder message processor system in claim 11, wherein said connecting means comprises connections through a Public Switch Telephony Network (PSTN).
14. The bidder message processor system in claim 11, wherein the connecting means is coupled to a voice conferencing means, for allowing the bidder voice terminal to voice conference with other bidder voice terminals connected to said auctioneer terminal through said connecting means.
15. The bidder message processor system in claim 14, wherein the connecting means is coupled to time compensation control means, for accounting for the propagation delay of said bidder message in travelling through the connecting means.

16. An auctioneer message processor system comprising:
an auctioneer voice transmitter for broadcasting auctioneer voice messages from an auctioneer terminal simultaneously to a plurality of bidder voice terminals;
and
connecting means for connecting said bidder voice terminals to said auctioneer voice transmitter over a communications network.

17. An auctioneer message processor in claim 16, wherein a record of participating bidders is updated through said connecting means and said auctioneer voice transmitter broadcasts auctioneer voice messages only to bidder voice terminals selected according to said record of participating bidders.

18. An auction system for use in an auction conducted over a communications network, the auction system comprising:
a bidder message processor comprising:
means for processing a bidder message entered through any one of a plurality of bidder voice terminals into a bidder data signals, wherein said bidder data signal comprises a bidder identifier; and
means for outputting the bidder data signals at an auctioneer terminal;
an auctioneer voice transmitter for broadcasting auctioneer voice messages from the auctioneer terminal simultaneously to selected bidder voice terminals; and
connecting means for connecting said bidder voice terminals to the bidder message processor and to the auctioneer voice transmitter over the communications network.

19. An auction system comprising:
auctioneer output means;
a plurality of bid interpreters which in operation are connected to a plurality of corresponding bidders voice terminals, wherein each bid interpreter comprises:
means for decoding bidder messages;

means for attaching corresponding bidder identifiers to each decoded bidder message and forming data signals; and
means for transmitting the data signals to the auctioneer output means, over a communications network,

an auctioneer voice manager coupled to the bid interpreters, for receiving voice messages from an auctioneer voice transmitter over the communications network and for broadcasting the auctioneer voice messages simultaneously to all bidder voice terminals connected to the bidder interpreters.

20. A method of processing bidder messages for use in an auction conducted over a communications network, the method comprising the steps of:

processing a bidder messages received entered through a voice terminal into a data (digital) signals;

attaching a bidder identifier to said data signal; and

outputting said data signal at an auctioneer terminal.

21. A method of conducting an auction over a communications network, the method comprising the steps of:

transmitting bidders messages over the communications network by:

receiving the bidder messages from a plurality of bidder voice terminals;

processing bidders messages into data signals;

forming output signals by attaching bidder identifiers to selected data signals; and

sending and outputting the output signals at an auctioneer terminal; and

transmitting auctioneer messages over the communications network by:

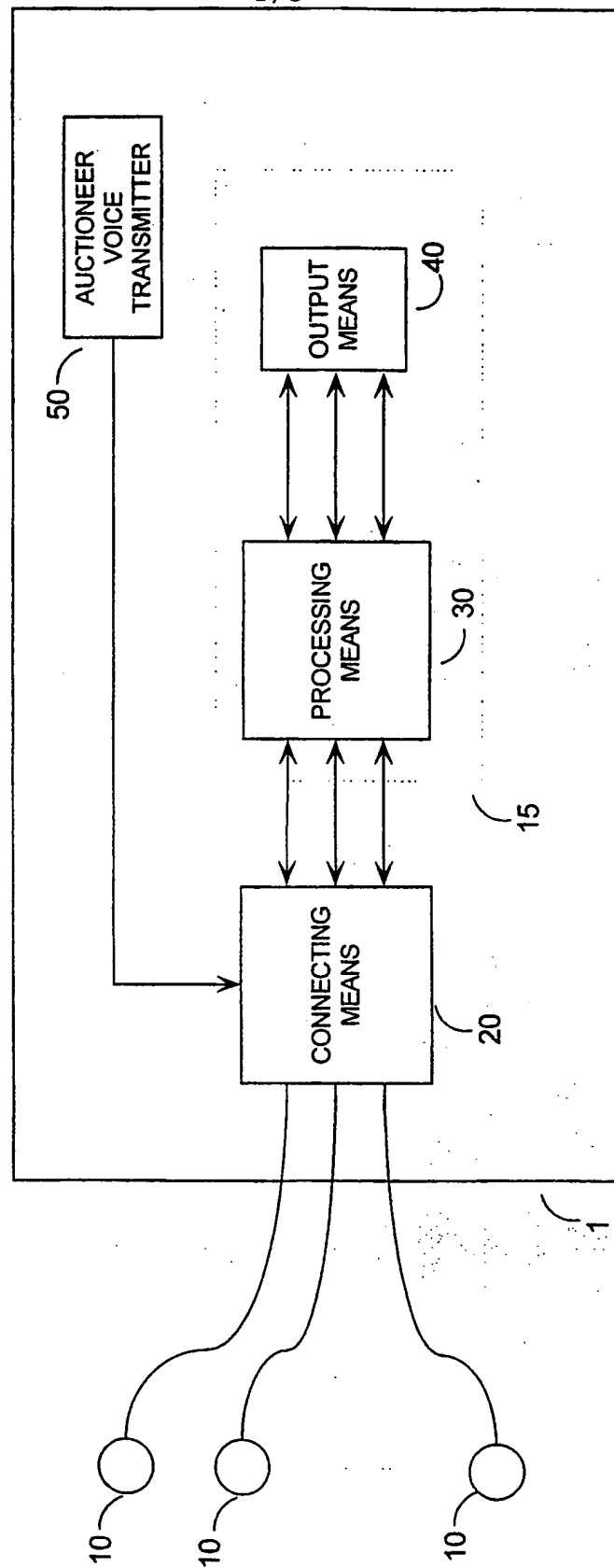
receiving the auctioneer messages from the auctioneer terminal;

broadcasting the auctioneer messages to selected bidder voice terminals.

22. A computer data signal embodied in a carrier wave, said computer data signal comprising a set of machine executable code being executable by a computer to perform the steps of any one of claims 20 or 21.

23. A computer readable storage medium storing a set of machine executable code, said set of machine executable code being executable by a computer server to perform the steps of any one of claims 20 or 21.

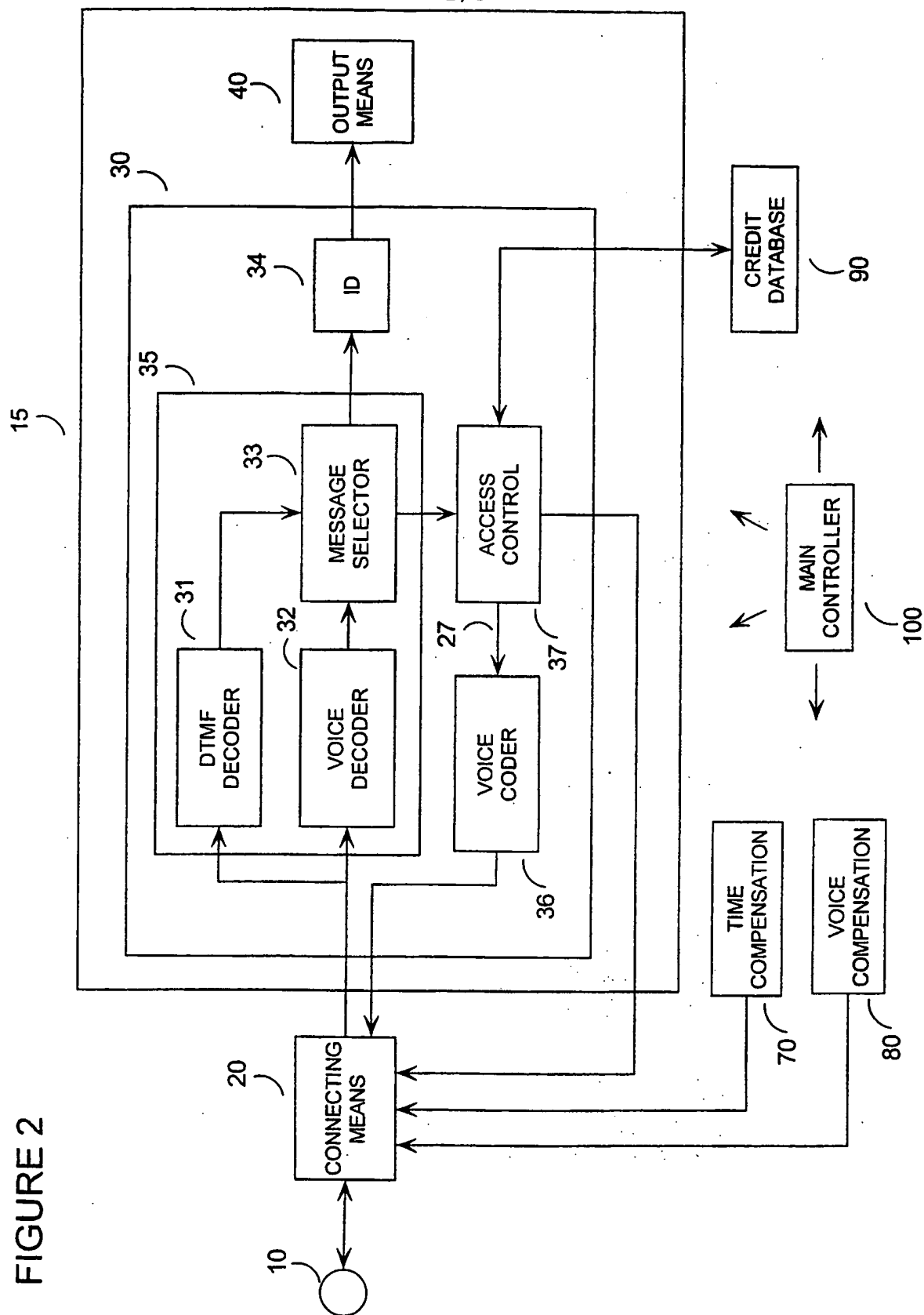
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FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2



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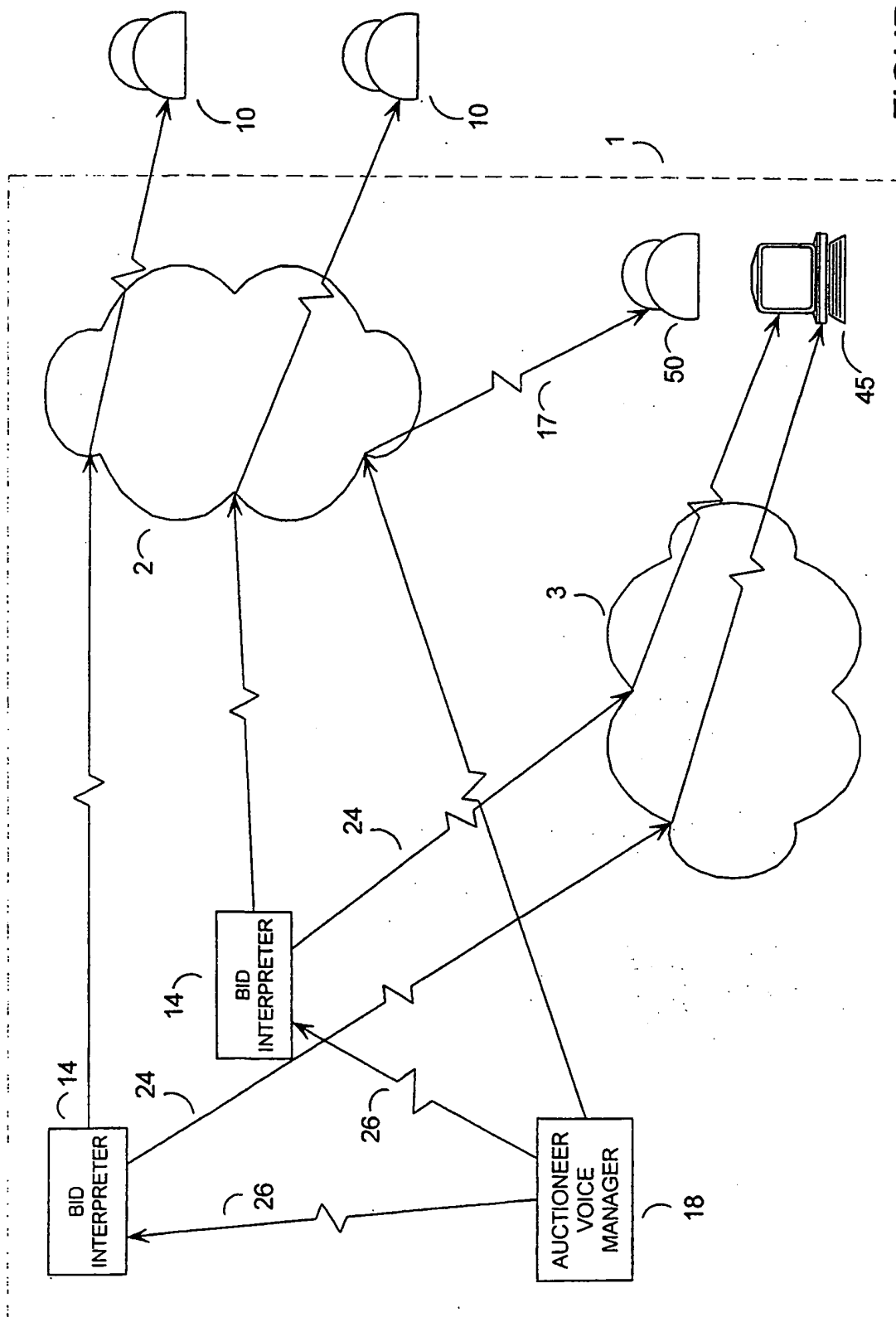


FIGURE 3

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/CA 99/00871

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 7 H04M3/50 H04M3/56 G06F17/60

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 H04M G06F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	EP 0 620 669 A (FIRST DATA RESOURCES INC) 19 October 1994 (1994-10-19) page 11, line 48 -page 12, line 57 ---	1-3, 5-13, 16-18, 20-23
A	EP 0 716 386 A (AUCNET INC) 12 June 1996 (1996-06-12) column 6, line 25 - line 32 ---	15
A	US 4 939 773 A (KATZ RONALD A) 3 July 1990 (1990-07-03) ---	14
A	FR 2 658 635 A (INFORMATIONS VENTES PUBLIQUES) 23 August 1991 (1991-08-23) -----	

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

24 January 2000

Date of mailing of the international search report

31/01/2000

Name and mailing address of the ISA

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl,
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Vandevenne. M

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No

PCT/CA 99/00871

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
EP 0620669 A	19-10-1994	US 4845739 A	04-07-1989
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PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

From the INTERNATIONAL BUREAU

PCT

NOTICE INFORMING THE APPLICANT OF THE COMMUNICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION TO THE DESIGNATED OFFICES

(PCT Rule 47.1(c), first sentence)

To:

O'NEILL, T., Gary
Gowling, Strathy & Henderson
Suite 2600
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Ottawa, Ontario K1P 1C3
CANADA

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PATENT DEPARTMENT

APR 18 200

BY: Kent Ledwell

Date of mailing (day/month/year) 06 April 2000 (06.04.00)		
Applicant's or agent's file reference O8-882304WO		IMPORTANT NOTICE
International application No. PCT/CA99/00871	International filing date (day/month/year) 24 September 1999 (24.09.99)	Priority date (day/month/year) 25 September 1998 (25.09.98)
Applicant WIRELESS SYSTEM TECHNOLOGIES, INC. et al		

1. Notice is hereby given that the International Bureau has communicated, as provided in Article 20, the international application to the following designated Offices on the date indicated above as the date of mailing of this Notice:
AU,CN,JP,KP,KR,US

In accordance with Rule 47.1(c), third sentence, those Offices will accept the present Notice as conclusive evidence that the communication of the international application has duly taken place on the date of mailing indicated above and no copy of the international application is required to be furnished by the applicant to the designated Office(s).

2. The following designated Offices have waived the requirement for such a communication at this time:

**AE,AL,AM,AP,AT,AZ,BA,BB,BG,BR,BY,CA,CH,CR,CU,CZ,DE,DK,DM,EA,EE,EP,ES,FI,GB,GD,GE,
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PL,PT,RO,RU,SD,SE,SG,SI,SK,SL,TJ,TM,TR,TT,TZ,UA,UG,UZ,VN,YU,ZA,ZW**

The communication will be made to those Offices only upon their request. Furthermore, those Offices do not require the applicant to furnish a copy of the international application (Rule 49.1(a-bis)).

3. Enclosed with this Notice is a copy of the international application as published by the International Bureau on
 06 April 2000 (06.04.00) under No. WO 00/19691

REMINDER REGARDING CHAPTER II (Article 31(2)(a) and Rule 54.2)

If the applicant wishes to postpone entry into the national phase until 30 months (or later in some Offices) from the priority date, a demand for international preliminary examination must be filed with the competent International Preliminary Examining Authority before the expiration of 19 months from the priority date.

It is the applicant's sole responsibility to monitor the 19-month time limit.

Note that only an applicant who is a national or resident of a PCT Contracting State which is bound by Chapter II has the right to file a demand for international preliminary examination.

REMINDER REGARDING ENTRY INTO THE NATIONAL PHASE (Article 22 or 39(1))

If the applicant wishes to proceed with the international application in the national phase, he must, within 20 months or 30 months, or later in some Offices, perform the acts referred to therein before each designated or elected Office.

For further important information on the time limits and acts to be performed for entering the national phase, see the Annex to Form PCT/IB/301 (Notification of Receipt of Record Copy) and Volume II of the PCT Applicant's Guide.

The International Bureau of WIPO 34, chemin des Colombettes 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland	Authorized officer <div style="text-align: right;">J. Zahra</div>
Facsimile No. (41-22) 740.14.35	Telephone No. (41-22) 338.83.38



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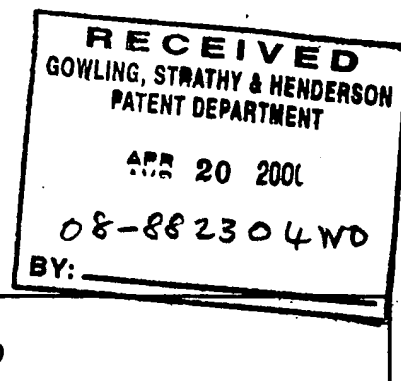
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Ottawa, Ontario K1P 1C3

CANADA



Datum/Date

13/04/00

Zeichen/Ref./Réf.	Anmeldung Nr./Application No./Demande n°/Patent Nr./Patent No./Brevet n°.
	99944207.2 - -PCT/CA9900871
Anmelder/Applicant/Demandeur/Patentinhaber/Proprietor/Titulaire	
WIRELESS SYSTEM TECHNOLOGIES, INC.	

NOTE: The following information concerns the steps which you are required to take for entry into the regional phase before the EPO. You are strongly advised to read it carefully. Failure to take the appropriate steps in due time could lead to the application being deemed withdrawn.

1. European patent application no. 99944207.2 has been allotted to the above-mentioned international patent application.
2. Applicants having neither a residence nor their principal place of business within the territory of one of the EPC Contracting States may initiate the regional (European) processing of the international application themselves, provided they do so before expiry of the 21st or 31st month as from the priority date (see Legal Advice of the EPO no. 18/92 published in OJ EPO 1992, 58).

Note, however, that such applicants must be represented in the regional phase before the EPO as designated or elected Office by a professional representative whose name appears on the EPO list of representatives (Arts. 133(2) and 134(1) EPC).

After expiry of the 21st or 31st month, any procedural steps which are taken by the representative of the applicant in the international phase, who is not, however, entitled to practise before the EPO, will have no effect and will, thus, result in loss of rights.

The appointment of a professional representative entitled to practise before the EPO is possible/advisable at an early stage during the international phase (any time after the 14th month from the priority date) in view of representing applicants before the EPO as designated or elected Office.

--/4



Therefore, an appointment in due time is strongly recommended, if it is intended that this representative should already act for entry into the regional phase, otherwise all communications will be forwarded from the EPO directly to the applicant.

3. Applicants having their address within the territory of one of the EPC Contracting States are not obliged to appoint a professional representative entitled to practise before the EPO to represent them in the regional phase where the EPO is designated or elected Office.

Note that due to the complexity of the proceedings, applicants are strongly advised to appoint such representative. Please keep in mind that, if a professional representative before the EPO has already acted for the applicant during the international phase, this representative is not automatically regarded as the representative for the regional phase.

4. Applicants and professional representatives are recommended to file EPO Form 1200 (available free of charge from the EPO) for entry into the regional phase. The use of Form 1200, however, is not mandatory.
5. FOR ENTRY INTO THE REGIONAL PHASE BEFORE THE EPO the following procedural steps must be taken. (Note that non-completion or ineffective completion of the required steps will result in loss of rights or other disadvantage.)
- 5.1 Within 21 months from the date of filing or (where applicable) from the earliest priority date if the EPO acts as DESIGNATED OFFICE pursuant to Article 22(1) PCT:

- a) Filing of a translation of the international application in an EPO official language if the International Bureau did not publish the application in one of those languages (Art. 22(1) PCT and Rule 104b(1)(a) EPC).

Note that if such translation is not filed in due time, the international application before the EPO is deemed withdrawn (Art. 24(1)(iii) PCT).

- b) Payment of the national fee [national basic fee, the designation fee for each State designated, (where applicable) the claims fees for the eleventh and each subsequent claim] and the search fee, where a supplementary European search report has to be drawn up (Rule 104b(1)(b), (c) EPC).

Upon expiry of the 21-month time limit provided for in Rule 104b(1) EPC the EPO sends the applicant or his appointed professional representative the communication pursuant to Rule 85a(1) EPC (Form 1217) and (where applicable) Rule 69(1) EPC (Form 1205)



unless it has been notified of its designation as elected Office in due time.

5.2 Within 31 months from the date of filing or (where applicable) from the earliest priority date if the EPO acts as ELECTED OFFICE pursuant to Article 39(1)(a) PCT:

- a) Filing of a translation as under 5.1 a).
- b) Payment of the fees as under 5.1 b).
- c) Filing of the written request for examination and payment of the examination fee (Rule 104b(1)(d) EPC).
Note that both acts must be performed in due time, otherwise the European patent application shall be deemed to be withdrawn (Art. 94(3) EPC).
- d) Payment of the renewal fee for the third year, if due before the expiration of the 31-month term (Rule 104b(1)(e) EPC).

6. The amounts of the fees (and equivalents in all currencies of the contracting states of the EPC) are regularly published in the Official Journal of the EPO.

If the national basic fee, the designation fees or the search fee have not been paid in time, they may still be validly paid within a grace period of one month as from notification of an EPO communication (Rule 85a(1) EPC).

If the renewal fee is not paid in time, it may still be validly paid within six months from the due date (Art. 86(2) EPC).

In both cases, a surcharge is due.

7. The international search report under Article 18 PCT (or the declaration under Article 17(2)(a) PCT) has been published by the International Bureau. The date of publication can be ascertained from the copy of the published application documents sent by the International Bureau or from the international search report, if published separately. This publication takes the place of the mention of the publication of the European search report (Art. 157(1) EPC).

A request for examination, comprising a written request and payment of the examination fee, must be filed up to the end of six months after the above date.

Anmeldung Nr./Application No./Demande n°./Patent Nr./Patent No./Brevet n°.	Blatt/Page/Feuille
99944207.2	3



However, in view of Article 22 or 39 PCT in conjunction with Rule 104b(1)(d) EPC, the period for filing the request for examination does not expire before 21 or 31 months, respectively, from the date of filing (where applicable, the earliest priority date).

A period of grace of one month from notification of an EPO communication is available in case either or both of the above acts have not been performed in time. Accordingly, a surcharge is due (Rule 85b EPC).

8. This information letter is addressed by the EPO to the agent, if any, having acted for the applicant during the international phase of the application.

Any further notifications on procedural matters will be addressed to the applicant, respectively his European representative, if the appointment of the latter has been communicated to the EPO in due time.

9. For further details see the information for PCT applicants concerning time limits and procedural steps before the EPO as a designated and as an elected Office under the PCT (published as Supplement No. 1 to OJ EPO 12/1992, with changes published in OJ EPO 1994, 131).

Concerning the list of professional representatives before the European Patent Office (see points 2 and 3), EPO Form 1200 (see point 4) and the actual fees to be paid (see point 6) we refer to the EPO's Internet address:
<http://www.european-patent-office.org>.

RECEIVING SECTION



Anmeldung Nr./Application No./Demande n°./Patent Nr./Patent No./Brevet n°.	Blatt/Page/Feuille
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